

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

INTRODUCTION, JURISDICTION, AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

The Committee on Government Reform has been in existence in varying forms since 1816. It first appeared as the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, which was created in 1927 by consolidating the 11 Committees on Expenditures previously spread among the various departments of the government to oversee how taxpayer monies were spent.

The Committee's immediate predecessor, the Committee on Government Operations, was established in 1952. The name change was intended to communicate to the outside world the primary function of the committee, that being to study "the operations of Government activities at all levels with a view to determining their economy and efficiency." It is the Committee's government-wide oversight jurisdiction that sets it apart from other House committees.

On January 4, 1995, Republicans assumed control of the House of Representatives for the first time in over forty years. Republicans immediately implemented several internal reforms to the House, including one which applies all of the laws the rest of America lives under to Congress and another to downsize the congressional committee system.

Perhaps more than any other committee, the Government Reform Committee embodies the changes taking place in the House of Representatives. The Committee's name was changed to highlight the Republican view that the federal government needs to be reformed to ensure accountability.

The Committee on Government Reform is unlike most other committees in that its jurisdiction has grown. Including the agenda of the former Committee on Government Operations, the Committee also has the responsibilities of the old Committee on Post Office and Civil Service and the Committee on the District of Columbia. The Committee has eight subcommittees responsible for the same jurisdiction previously covered by 3 committees and 14 subcommittees. This consolidation resulted in millions of dollars in budget savings and a nearly 50% cut in staff.

The Committee's government-wide oversight jurisdiction and expanded legislative authority makes it one of the most influential and powerful committees in the House. Thirty-eight percent of the 'Contract With America' moved through the Committee in the 104th Congress. The Committee and its eight subcommittees conducted 252 hearings during the 105th Congress.

The following three pieces of 'Contract With America' legislation, which originated in this Committee, became public law during the 104th Congress: 1) a bill to stop Congress from passing unfunded mandates; 2) line-item veto legislation granting the President authority to

strike individual items from tax and spending bills; and 3) a bill reducing the paperwork burden the federal government imposes on government, individual, and private businesses. In addition, the Committee crafted legislation that also became public law to create a financial recovery board to bring the District of Columbia out of its financial crisis.

Public outrage at reports of ineffectiveness, waste, fraud and abuse in the use of public monies shows that investigation and oversight is one of the most important functions that a Congressional committee can perform. The Government Reform Committee serves as Congress' chief investigative and oversight committee of the Federal government. The Committee is granted broad jurisdiction because of the importance of effective, centralized oversight. Because it authorizes only a few small agencies and programs, it is therefore able to review government agencies and programs with an unbiased eye.

During the 104th Congress under Chairman Bill Clinger, the Committee investigated the improper firings of White House Travel Office workers and the White House's controversial handling of FBI files. During the 105th Congress under Chairman Burton, the Committee was charged with investigating millions of dollars in illegal foreign contributions that flowed into Presidential campaigns.

The first reelection of a Republican majority in the House in sixty-eight years paved the way for Congressman Dan Burton of Indiana to assume the Chairmanship of the Government Reform and Oversight Committee. He became the first Republican Member from the Hoosier state to chair a full Committee of the House since 1931. Before becoming a senior member of the new Government Reform and Oversight Committee in 1995, Congressman Burton had served on the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service since 1983.

The Committee currently has forty-four members: twenty-four Republicans, twenty Democrats and one Independent. There are eight subcommittees to oversee all Federal agencies, including the civil service, the post office, and the District of Columbia. Congressman Henry Waxman (D-CA) serves as the Ranking Minority Member of the Committee.

Committee alumni include distinguished, well-respected, and often well-known legislators and national leaders. During his only term in the House of Representatives, Abraham Lincoln was assigned, like many first-term members, to one of the Committee's predecessor committees, the Committee on Expenditures in the War Department. Other alumni include: Majority Leader Dick Armey (TX), former Senate Majority Leader and 1996 Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole (KS), former Vice-President Dan Quayle (IN), former-presidential candidate John B. Anderson (IL), former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (IL), the late-Senator John Heinz (PA), and former Speakers of the House John McCormack (MA) and Jim Wright (TX).

The following pages contain additional information on the Committee's jurisdiction, membership and activities. A listing of Members, subcommittees, and staff has been provided, along with phone numbers and addresses.

Questions or comments should be directed to the Office of Communications, Committee on Government Reform, 2157 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-5074, fax (202) 225-3974. The Committee's web site is <http://www.house.gov/reform>